Marvell, Hegel, and Natural Theology: Nature as a Divine Manifestation of Christian Liberty

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Introduction

The heavily layered and complex structure of Andrew Marvell's treatment of nature as a divine vehicle of Christian liberty is no more apparent than in his poem, 'Upon Appleton House'. Why does Marvell, or more accurately, the Speaker of 'Upon Appleton House' present nature as a divine manifestation of Christian revelation that culminates in a greater understanding of both God and the natural world? Here, I propose that an analysis of Marvell's treatment of nature as a divine manifestation is essential for an understanding of his reflections on the relationships between Christian liberty and nature. I argue that 'Upon Appleton House' may be read as both a theological poem that is akin to medieval natural theology, and a philosophical poem that can be read through Hegel's *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts*. I have chosen to incorporate both a theological and philosophical framework to this article to suggest that philosophical and theological scholarship can be applied to achieve a greater understanding of literature.

> C'etait une belle *â*me, comme on ne fait plus *à* Londres.[1]

The natural world as represented in Andrew Marvell's poem 'Upon Appleton House' is imbued with an innate theological hue. Nature is perceived through the prism of the biblical creation story and subsequent narrative trajectory of fall, expulsion, redemption, and recreation.[2]

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[1] T.S. Eliot, 'Andrew Marvell', in *T.S. Eliot Selected Essays: New Edition* (New York: Harcourt, 1950), p. 255. English translation: "It was a noble soul, as not made any more in London."

[2] Simon Marsden, ''The Earth No Longer Void': Creation Theology in the Novels of Charlotte Brontë', *Literature and Theology*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2011), p. 237.

Thus, Marvell's poem does not only discuss ideas that pertain to natural theology, but also discusses the true character of Christian freedom in sensuous poetry. Nature for the Speaker is not only viewed as a divine vehicle, but more importantly, it represents a nexus of ideas culminating in Christian liberty, despite the poem having been understood to uphold Puritan values.[3] Most Marvellian criticism in regard to 'Upon Appleton House' builds its interpretation of the poem around an allegory of British contemporary political history, with special reference to the excesses of the Civil War. It has also been read as a dedication poem to Lord Thomas Fairfax, depicting Fairfax as the perfect embodiment of both the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, a hero of the Civil War, and a man of religious virtuosity. I will suggest that when this traditional reading of 'Upon Appleton House' is dismissed, what becomes apparent is a new understanding of Marvell's poem. It becomes not simply 'Upon Appleton House', the devotional poem to Lord Thomas Fairfax, but instead, 'Upon Appleton House', a poem that is a complex theological edifice. The first section proper of this article will define what is meant by natural theology to achieve a greater understanding of the value of interpreting Marvell's poem through this lens. The second section will offer a rigorous examination of the religious depiction of nature in the poem, and argue that Marvell's engagement with the Biblical narrative of Genesis engages both humanity's loss and gain through the decisive act of the divine will of God. The third section will reflect on how this enigmatic and difficult poem can be understood through Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1835), and in particular, his treatment of nature. Hegel's understanding of both poetry and nature share a tripartite symbiosis with religion.

To this end, I will argue that while most critical perspectives on Andrew Marvell over the last twenty years have been dominated by re-establishing historical and social context as the crucial factor in understanding his poetry,[4] what critics have failed to realise is that Marvell's poem is not only concerned with a politically tumultuous time in English history,[5] but it is also richly enmeshed with other strands of

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[3] Warren L. Chernaik, *The Poet's Time: Politics and Religion in the Work of Andrew Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 104.
[4] Thomas Healy, *Andrew Marvell* (London: Longman, 1998), p. 1.
[5] This refers to the English Civil War that occurred between the years 1642-1651, the death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658, and the English Restoration in 1660. Under King Charles II

thought, such as nature, philosophy, and religion.[6] Furthermore, I will establish that once the attention is taken away from the author, the text transforms into something new and allows original avenues of interpretation. Additionally, Marvell's contemporaries John Milton and John Donne feature prominently in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, a volume in which Marvell has not been included. This omission points to the fact that there is a lacuna in academic scholarship regarding the religious importance of Marvell's poetry, which closely coheres with the importance Hegel places on fine art, which together with philosophy and religion are the three modes of the spirit's knowledge of itself.[7] 'Upon Appleton House' not only arouses the spiritual and sensuous aspects of humanity,[8] but also contains some of the most sensitive reflections on the relations between humanity, the natural world, and the Divine in seventeenth century poetry.[9]

The Book of Nature

When attempting to define natural theology, no simple answer emerges. In this instance, natural theology will be discussed from a medieval standpoint, on the basis that the Speaker of 'Upon Appleton House' seeks to discuss ideas about God, Nature, and Humankind that are consistent with medieval apologists, and other Christian natural theologians. Natural theology can be understood within a tripartite framework. First, Nature is viewed as a vehicle of divine revelation; second, "absent revelation, knowledge of God can be difficult to acquire (hence it often discusses the need for some type of Divine illumination)," [10] and third, creation is a divine artefact that manifests something of God's essence. Here, the Book

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the triple Monarchy of England, Ireland, and Scotland was restored. See Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England 1485-1714: A Narrative History* (London: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 147.

[6] Andrew McRae, 'The Green Marvell', in Derick Hirst and Steven N. Zwicker (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 132.

[7] G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 89.

[8] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 39.

[9] McRae, 'The Green Marvell', p. 123.

[10] Alexander W. Hall, 'Natural Theology in the Middle Ages', in Russell Re Manning (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 57.

of Nature[11] is as important as the scriptures, if not more so, and the *"*articles of faith are indemonstrable and reason fallible - thus, philosophy is ancillary to theology.*"*[12] Importantly, medieval theology is heavily imbued with Aristotelian teleology[13] and Platonic metaphysics.[14] Medieval theologians *"*insisted that Scripture only set the agenda for and fixes the parameters of natural theology.*"*[15] Thus, medieval theology does not observe human beings and nature through a literal interpretation of the Bible; instead the natural world functions as a means for human beings to detect signs of the glory of God. A pertinent example is found in Psalm 104:5-25:

> You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. You cover it with the deep as with garment; the waters stood above the mountains... you set a boundary that they may not pass, so that they might not again cover the earth... you cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for people to use, to bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the human heart... the young lions roar for their preys, seeking their food from God... O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom, you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.

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[11] The term, 'Book of Nature', was coined by Augustine of Hippo in the early Christian era. He refers to Nature as a metaphorical Book that is as important to read as the physical Book of Scriptures. Ultimately, Augustine claims in his *Sermon* 126.6 that "some people read books in order to find God. Yet there is a great book, the very appearance of created things." What Augustine means is that human beings can come to understand God through the natural world, not only through the Scriptures. See Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), p. 17.

[12] Hall, 'Natural Theology in the Middle Ages', p. 57.

[13] What I mean by Aristotelian teleology is that although Aquinas writes as a Christian theologian, he structures his philosophical argument in *Summa Theologica*, or more specifically his *Quinque Viæ*, on Aristotle's *Metaphysics.* A contradiction ensued: propositions that contradicted certain tenets of faith included matters such as the eternality of the universe, divine providence, human freedom, and the natural world were overlooked. Moreover, Aquinas was attempting to demonstrate that Aristotelianism need not threaten Christian theology. See John F. Wippel, 'Thomas Aquinas', in Graham Oppy and Nick Trakakis (eds), *The History of Western Philosophy, Volume 2: Medieval Philosophy of Religion* (Durham, UK: Acumen, 2009), p. 168.

[14] It can be understood that theologians such as Augustine credit Plato with discovering that God is "the author of all created things, the light by which things are known, and the good for the sake of which things are done." See Augustine, *The Basic Writings of Saint Augustine*, ed. Whitney J. Oates and trans. J.F. Shaw (New York: Random House, 1948), p. 216.

[15] Hall, 'Natural Theology in the Middle Ages', p. 58.

Here the Old Testament book of Psalms reinforces the notion found in the Judeo-Christian tradition where nature is understood as a sign of "divine Providence," which reinforces the theological importance that "there is no need of words to laud God's glory, as the creation itself is a living testament."[16] 'Upon Appleton House' shares similar aesthetic engagement with the theologically complex relationship between Nature, God, and Humankind. On this point, literary critic Bruce King agrees with such exegetical claims, stating that the poem "seeks to show that the intended meaning of its metaphysical prose can only be understood when read through the allegorical method employed by Biblical commentators."[17] However, it is only when the "identity of the author is lost,"[18] that it is possible to realise that like medieval theologians, the Speaker in 'Upon Appleton House' treats Nature as a theological and philosophical instrument to explore the complex relation between Humans and the Divine.

The Garden of Eden and the New Covenant

Once the reader dismisses the "tyrannical emphasis contemporary criticism has placed on the author,"[19] what becomes obvious is that there is a single religious motif that dominates the poem. That is, humankind's attempt to understand the divine workings of God through the natural world. For Hegel, this is considered significant when defining what is considered artistic, as well for his philosophical views on nature. Hegel argues that "the subject matter of fine art in a certain respect must be drawn from the sensuous form of nature: whereby nature is displayed spiritually and religiously."[20] Hegel's idea of what is artistic is consistent with the poem, wherein Nature is described as symbolising more than just the beauty of God's creation; it is also "orderly" and "free". This notion of nature as "orderly" is described by Hegel as a structured manifold that represents a

[16] Stephen R.L. Clark, 'Out of Chaos', in Russell Re Manning (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Natural Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 25.
[17] Bruce King, *Marvell's Allegorical Poetry* (New York: Oleander Press, 1977), p. 27.
[18] Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), p. 151.
[19] Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, p. 150.
[20] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 41.

finite teleology.[21] That is, God for Hegel is that being in whom the spirit (*geist)* and nature (*natur*) are united, and what he refers to as *naturgeist*. More specifically, Hegel proposes that nature is continuously striving to reach the full embodiment of forms, or in other words perfection, but does not succeed completely.[22] Hegel's notion of nature as teleological assists in understanding the poem's religious edifice, whereby the fecundity and creation of nature is "understood to be God's blessing of the people's covenant and obedience."[23] Hence, nature does not only symbolise God as the creator of order, but also functions as a divine teleological mechanism that upholds this order for humanity. Importantly, nature represents the reciprocal relationship that exists between God, the protector of order, and humankind, the subjects of Earth. This relationship is expressed by the Speaker claiming that "Nature here hath been so free", and that the "garden belongs to the world," which "heaven planted us to please". Here, the Speaker is communicating ideas that are consistent with medieval natural theology by claiming that nature has been created by God, in Heaven, and planted on Earth for all of humanity; symbolising a divine freedom that belongs to all inhabitants on Earth. Flowers are called "eternal and divine," being not just objects and matter, but holy artefacts that signify the essence of God.

In the latter half of the poem the Speaker adopts a rather paradoxical approach to nature, describing nature with militaristic imagery. The garden is no longer for everyone, instead, it is a "soldier's place" where flowers are not divine but "garrisons," and "forts". Here, nature is represented, paradoxically: "in one sense the natural world is celebrated as the divine handiwork of God that establishes order, and in another view, the natural world symbolises disharmony and death."[24] This paradoxical representation of nature can be read as a reminder to humankind that while God is the centre of order, mortality is the "physical force in nature, that

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[21] G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature: Being Part Two of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, ed. Arnold V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 245.
[22] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 86.
[23] Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (eds), *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), p. 590.
[24] Joan F. Adkins, 'Neoplatonism in Marvell's "On a Drop of Dew" and "The Garden"', *The Bulletin of the Rocky Mountains Modern Language Association*, vol. 28, no. 4 (1974), p. 77.

being Humankind, is the principal force of disorder in it.*"*[25] The Speaker asks, *"*what luckless apple did we taste, to make us mortal, and thee waste?*"* The allusion here to the apple *"*links nature and humankind with Adam and Eve, and their inevitable Fall from Grace which functions as a reminder that while God gave human beings free will, they also inherited mortality because of their disobedience.*"*[26] Ultimately, God*'*s punishment of Adam and Eve demonstrates his divine power over the natural order of the world; and therefore, the inhabitants of *'*Upon Appleton House*'* must obey the natural order of the world according to God, otherwise they will also be punished and suffer the same consequence.

What emerges is an ambivalent Christian view of nature, which typifies the natural theological concern of absent revelation, which needs to be attained through divine illumination. The Speaker says that they have *"*retired from the flood,*"* and taken *"*sanctuary in the wood*"*. These statements can be interpreted as an allusion to the Biblical deluge in Genesis 6:9-9:17:

> Now the earth was corrupt in God*'*s sight and was full of violence. God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. So, God said to Noah, *"*I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth

Further, the Speaker claims that humankind can unite itself with nature through the process of *"*a new an empty face of things: A levelled space, as smooth and plain*"* (lines 442-443). This can be understood as the earth reverting to a *tabula rasa*,[27] *"*The world when first created, sure, was such a table, rase and pure*"* (lines 445-446). The concept of the world as a *tabula rasa* evokes Aristotelian notions of creation and thought, argued in his

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[25] Ballachandra Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 38.

[26] Henrietta Buck, *A Study of Religious Imagery in the Poetry of Andrew Marvell* (Stillwater, OK: Oklahoma State University Library, 1960), p. 39.

[27] "Comparison of the mind to a blank writing tablet occurs in Aristotle's *De anima* (4th century BCE; *On the Soul*), and the Stoics as well as the Peripatetics (students at the Lyceum, the school founded by Aristotle) subsequently argued for an original state of mental blankness. Both the Aristotelians and the Stoics, however, emphasized those faculties of the mind or soul that, having been only potential or inactive before receiving ideas from the senses, respond to the ideas by an intellectual process and convert them into knowledge." See 'Tabula Rasa', *Encyclopædia Britannica*, at https://www.britannica.com/topic/tabula-rasa. Accessed 20/04/2017.

work *De Anima* (350 BCE), *"*that like nature, the mind was first a mere *Tabula Rasa."*[28] This Aristotelian notion of creation does not only reinforce the poem*'*s use of themes that pertain to natural theology, but also echoes the biblical flood narrative in Genesis, wherein God destroys the natural world as an act of cleansing the wickedness and corruption of humanity. This act does not only function as one of destruction, but also more importantly of renewal. Essentially, the deluge narrative functions as a divine revelation of God*'*s work. Noah, in the traditional narrative is told by God *"*To make yourself an Ark of cypress wood*"* (Genesis 6:14-15), though the Speaker of *'*Upon Appleton House*'* finds safety from the flood in nature *"*when first the eye this forest sees it seems indeed as wood not trees*"* where *"*arching boughs unite between The columns of the temple green*"* (lines 509-510). The significance here is that the Speaker*'*s ark of salvation is not manmade as in the traditional narrative of Genesis, but instead is a temple created from nature, in nature, where nature has *'*encompassed*'* their mind. Essentially, it is here in the forest-temple that the speaker achieves a sense of oneness with all living things:

> Thus, I easy philosopher, Among the birds and trees confer.
> And little now to make me wants.
> Or of the fowls, or of the plants:
> Give me but wings as they, and I
> Straight floating on the air shall fly:
> Or turn me but, and you shall see
> I was but an inverted tree not only (Stanza71)

This stanza reinforces the notion that the Speaker has physiologically and psychologically formed a relationship with nature, to the point where nature has become anthropomorphic. Ultimately, nature physically replaces the Ark, which subverts traditional ideas of Puritanism[29] by rejecting the traditional Covenant that Noah makes with God, and substituting it with a new Covenant, a Covenant that is built on the foundation of nature. Moreover, the Speaker*'*s mind, body and soul share a reciprocal relationship with Nature, which serves as the most important theological

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[28] Aristotle, *De Anima: On the Soul*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 63.

[29] What I mean by Puritanism is that devotees' adherence makes God's will plain through grace, the elevation of preaching, the strict authority of the scriptures, and the individual conscience above the sacraments, church ritual, and priestly intervention. For a further understanding of Puritanism see Francis J. Bremer, *Puritanism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 51.

notion of the poem because it signifies that nature is more than a place, "it is a way of life and a state of soul."[30] Additionally, it is through the Speaker's unification with nature that God is able to restore the natural world to order. On this point, literary critic Donald Friedman agrees that the Speaker of 'Upon Appleton House' is a "worshipper of nature."[31] Also, the deluge metaphor acts as a signifier of the new relationship humanity shares with the natural world; the Speaker has formed a new Covenant with God. However, unlike like the Covenant God forms with Noah, the Speaker of 'Upon Appleton House' forms a different Covenant that places nature as of utmost importance. This subverts the traditional first Covenant set out in Genesis:[32]

> For now, the waves are fall'n and dried,
> And now the meadows fresher dyed,
> Whose grass, with moister colour dashed,
> Seems as green silks but newly washed.
> No serpent new or crocodile (stanza 79)

This also reinforces the notion that after the deluge the natural world has been purged of wickedness and corruption where the grass has been "dashed with colour" and "newly washed". Also, in this new Edenic Garden there is no "serpent" to tempt mortal free will or "crocodile" to disrupt the order of nature. What is striking about this line is the conflict between what the Speaker of the poem considers to be 'naturally' divine. In this instance, the serpent and the crocodile are represented as signifying temptation and the disruption of order.

This is a perfect example of Hegel's teleological structure of nature, as the serpent and the crocodile are not yet perfected in the image of God, that is nature has not yet attained perfection because there is no place for the crocodile or serpent in this new Eden. In a Spinozian sense, the limitations of nature are still constrained by the notions of *natura naturans*

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[30] Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, p. 315.
[31] Donald M. Friedman, 'Andrew Marvell', in *The Cambridge Companion to Poetry, Donne to Marvell*, ed. Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), p. 278.
[32] The covenant that is set out in Genesis 9:8-11 (King James Version) reads: "And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth."

and *natura naturata*.[33] Moreover, while some objects of the natural world have been renewed through the power of the divine will of God, other objects have not. This signifies that the natural world has not yet been completely perfected. Here, it is through the divine revelation of God that human beings can regain true Christian liberty, by re-establishing order in the natural world the celebration of pastoral *otium* can begin. However, the paradoxical representation of nature should not be forgotten too soon, as nature can also be understood as *"*imposing the limits and finitude of human life.*"*[34]

Holy Mathematics

While *'*Upon Appleton House*'* draws heavily upon Biblical allusions to convey ideas that are consistent with natural theology, the poem also incorporates mathematical metaphors in an attempt to harmonise the relationship between the natural world and humankind. In a way, geometry provides a framework through which the poem builds its entire religious and theological edifice. This is most notable in Stanza 6:

> Let others vainly strive t'immure
> The circle in the quadrature!
> These holy mathematics can
> In every figure equal man

On this point, literary scholar Philippa Kelly is sceptical of the poem*'*s use of a geometrical metaphor, questioning whether the *"*use of a geometrical metaphor is merely an intellectual exercise which versifies and complicates the poem,*"*[35] or whether it can be understood as a *"*complex theological metaphor.*"*[36] Critic Don Parry Norford agrees with the latter interpretation;

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[33] *Natura naturata* and *Natura naturans* can be understood as philosophical concepts that illustrate the paradox of nature. On one hand, *Natura naturans* is understood as the active nature that has been created by the divine spark of God. On the other hand, *Natura naturata* is understood as nature that is not active by the divine power of God, but something rather already created. This philosophical paradox is evident in regard to the serpent and the crocodile. Spinoza can be accredited to coining the term in the following passage from *Ethics*: "I understand whatever follows from the necessity of God's nature, or from any of God's attributes, i.e., all the modes of God's attributes insofar as they are considered as things that are in God and can neither be nor be conceived without God." Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Classics, 1996), p. 13.

[34] Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, p. 316.

[35] L.E. Semler and Philippa Kelly, *Word and Self Estranged in English Texts, 1550-1660* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 103.

[36] Semler and Kelly, *Word and Self Estranged in English Texts*, p. 103.

he hypothesises that, *"*The circle in the quadrature*"* line *"*underpins the entire theological framework of *Appleton House."*[37] Further, Norford synthesises Stanza 6 as a paradox of the age-old mathematical conundrum of 'squaring the circle'.[38] That is, the metaphorical properties of the square and circle hold the theological answer to understanding the conflict between humankind and nature, and according to Norford the reader needs to comprehend that:

> the square images the world of time and matter, with its laws and proportions, and the logic with which we perceive them, and the circle images the world of eternity, infinity, imagination, and the theological constructs which we develop to conceptualise it.[39]

Thus, to square the circle, humanity must *"*harmonize these two parts of our being.*"*[40] With this *figura* in mind *"*the circle in the quadrature*"* can be interpreted as a geometrical metaphor, whereby the square symbolises humankind and the circle symbolises the natural world. Crucially, the *"*circle in the quadrature*"* does not only function as a complex metaphor that compares humans and nature to abstract equations, but also operates as a cryptic code in which, solving is the main goal of *"*human contemplation and inquiry to the Divine.*"*[41] What is striking about the *"*circle in the quadrature*"* is the fact that the equation is impossible to solve; the circle cannot, and never will be able to, be of the same area as the square. Clearly, the Speaker is claiming that for humankind to achieve harmony and order with the divine it must harmonise itself within the natural world, and metaphorically must fit into the square. However, the Speaker is aware that this action is impossible to achieve; and therefore, the conflict between God, nature and humankind will continue.

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[37] Don Parry Norford, 'Marvell's 'Holy Mathematics'', *Modern Language Quarterly*, vol. 38, no.2 (1977), p. 246.

[38] 'Squaring the circle' concerns constructing a square of which the area is equal to that enclosed by the circle. This is the equivalent to the problem of the rectification of the circle, i.e., of the determination of a straight line, of which the length is equal to that of the circumference of the circle. While there have been several attempts throughout the ages to solve the 'squaring of the circle' equation, it has been deemed impossible to solve. See Frank J. Swetz, *Learning Activities from the History of Mathematics* (Portland, ME: Walch Publishing, 1993), p. 213.

[39] Andrew Marvell, *Marvell, Pastoral and Lyric Poems 1681*, eds David Ormerod and Christopher Wortham (Crawley, WA: University of Western Australia, 2000), p. 158.

[40] Marvell, *Pastoral and Lyric Poems*, p. 158.

[41] Marvell, *Pastoral and Lyric Poems*, p. 159.

While the *"*circle in the quadrature*"* raises questions of paradoxical impossibility, what becomes obvious by the end of the poem is that the Speaker has successfully united himself with nature and *"*squared the circle.*"* Through God*'*s destruction and renewal of the natural world the Speaker of the poem physically and physiologically unites with nature. The Speaker is not only described as anthropomorphic, by speaking with the birds and the trees, but they find a new sense of religious meaning in nature, where temples are built with trees, not bricks and mortar. Moreover, the Speaker*'*s naturalist transformation is reinforced when they claim they *"*Hath read in Nature*'*s mystic book.*"* Due to the ambiguity of the line, two interpretations can be offered. First, the Book of Nature can be understood as a metaphorical book that natural theologians asserted was as important as the book of Scriptures, as Augustine proposed. Augustine says that:

> Some people read books in order to find God. Yet there is a great book, the very appearance of created things. Look above you; look below you! Note it; read it! God, whom you wish to find, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, he set before your eyes the things that He had made.[42]

Second, a more nuanced interpretation of the Book of Nature can be attributed to Galileo who was renowned for his philosophical maxim, the *"*Book of Nature is written in the language of mathematics.*"*[43] According to Galileo*'*s argument in his *Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences*, the natural world is characterised by *"*circles, squares, triangles and other geometrical shapes*"*.[44] This is ultimately suggesting, that through the language of geometry an individual can understand the natural workings of God. Moreover, for Galileo the Book of Nature functions as a mathematical epistemology that provides answers to humankind*'*s questions concerning God and nature. Nonetheless, both interpretations of the Book of Nature are consistent with human beings attempting to unify themselves with the divine through nature. Whilst Augustine simply says to *"*Look above you; look below you! Note it; read,*"* Galileo offers a mathematical epistemology to understand nature. In addition, to reinforce the Galilean interpretation of the Book of Nature the Speaker describes mathematics as being *"*holy*"*. This is consistent with Galileo who believed that *"*geometry was a means

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[42] Vernon Joseph Bourke, *The Essential Augustine* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 1985), p. 123.
[43] Galileo Galilei, *Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences*, eds Henry Crew and Alfonso de Salvio (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2010 [1632]), p. 167.
[44] Galilei, *Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences*, p. 167.

to answer theological questions of God.*"*[45] Therefore, if mathematics is understood in terms of holiness, it is being defined and described in the same way as nature, *"*Divine.*"* Hence, if we interpret mathematics and nature as sharing a divine symbiotic relationship in the poem that needs to be synthesised, we arrive at the conclusion that the poem*'*s main theological dilemma is humankind attempting to harmonise nature and the divine, and its understanding of nature through nature and mathematics. This statement can also be read as a Hegelian proposition, as Hegel supported Pythagorean notions of geometry. Hegel believed that numbers are the reality of things, and the constitution of the whole universe, that is, numbers constitute a harmonious system and structure of knowledge.[46] Essentially, the Speaker solves the unanswerable geometrical equation of *"*squaring the circle*"* through the harmonisation of nature through *"*Holy Mathematics*"*. This is evident in the penultimate (96th) stanza where the Speaker says:

> Tis not, what once it was, the world,
> But a rude heap together hurled,
> All negligently overthrown,
> Gulfs, deserts, precipices, stone.
> Your lesser world contains the same
> But in more decent order tame;
> You, heaven*'*s centre, Nature*'*s lap,
> And paradises only map.

This stanza reinforces the concept that humankind has successfully harmonised itself with nature, and that that the natural word is no longer the same. Nature is no longer a *"*rude heap together hurled*"*; but instead a *"*decent order*"*, that functions as *"*heavens centre, Nature*'*s lap*"* and *"*paradises only map*"*. The stanza also reveals how order has returned to the natural world, through humankind*'*s ability to understand God through nature.

The aim of this article has been to offer an examination of the religious symbols, allusions and motifs that are consistent with ideas of natural theology in Marvell*'*s *'*Upon Appleton House*'*. That is, by applying a natural theological lens to Marvell*'*s *'*Upon Appleton House*'* what has

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[45] Joseph C. Pitt, *Galileo, Human Knowledge, and the Book of Nature: Method Replaces Metaphysics* (Ontario: Springer Science & Business Media, 1992), p. 25.
[46] G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth Sanderson Halde (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), p. 90.

hopefully become evident is that the poem can be interpreted and understood in a completely different way to past Marvellian criticism. When the reader dismisses Marvell the author, the poem serves as both an ode to Lord Fairfax, and a poem that communicates strong Christian theological notions of humanity attempting to understand God through the natural world. In addition, this article has made no attempt to formulate a theology or philosophy that can be accredited to Marvell the man; instead, the poem has been read using a natural theological lens to offer a unique and original interpretation of *'*Upon Appleton House*'*, which will provide new venues of interrogation and new perspectives. Additionally, Hegel*'*s tripartite framework of art, poetry, and religion has been applied to demonstrate that *'*Upon Appleton House*'* securely fits into such a tradition. More importantly, *'*Upon Appleton House*'* as a work of art *"*has an end, and an aim outside of itself.*"*[47] The poem does not only function as a piece of tasteful literature, but rather a poem that attempts to arouse religious and spiritual feelings in the reader about perennial concerns for humanity. Moreover, this research has suggested that by suspending the historical, religious, and political contexts of Marvell*'*s poem *'*Upon Appleton House*'* what emerges is a poem which is concerned with doctrinal notions that pertain to humanity, God, nature, and the synthesis of all three of these concepts. Importantly, Marvell*'*s *'*Upon Appleton House*'* offers a meditation on the relationship between the divine and human. In order *"*to restore criticism to its future, we must reverse its myth: the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the author.*"*[48] Only when readers discard Marvell*'*s biography do we find that *'*Upon Appleton House*'* is a poem that uniquely searches out ways in which the natural world can be perceived and understood by humanity, through the divine nature of God.

[47] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, p. 27.
[48] Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, p. 151.